

James Hillman and the Reanimation of the World

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The close connection between the personified world of animism and anima—soul—is more than verbal, and personifying is a way of soul-making. (Hillman, 1975, p. 3)

The Extent of Soul

WITH THE PASSING OF JAMES HILLMAN on October 27, 2011, the field of ecopsychology has lost one of its inspirational figures. Hillman was drawn to Jungian psychology in the 1950s but began to break away from mainstream Jungian thought by the early 1970s, initiating what he called “archetypal psychology” (Hillman, 1970/1978). He claimed that the Jungian world had become dogmatic and resistant to new ideas, and he felt that *psyche* was being unnecessarily confined to human subjectivity. Hillman argued that there are numerous cultural traditions in which psyche or soul extends not only beyond the personal into the human collective but beyond humanity into animals, nature, and cosmos. Soul does not respect artificial borders of inside/outside but penetrates the whole of creation as *anima mundi*, or soul of the world. In the modern period we have lost this cosmic dimension, largely as a result of the intellectual enlightenment and its confinement of subjectivity to the human. At the same time, and with devastating consequences, humans have begun to lose their souls and to function as mere economic units in a social order.

Hillman experimented with the Jungian legacy, which for him meant championing creativity, philosophical inquiry, and risk-taking. His school or movement attracted a great deal of interest from fans and critics alike, who watched closely as “archetypal psychology” began to expand across North America, influencing fields as diverse as literary studies, the creative arts, phenome-

nology, ecological studies, urban planning, Neoplatonic studies, art history, and psychotherapy (Hillman, 1983). Hillman added culture, ecology, cosmos, and philosophy to the Jungian discourse. His efforts to revision psychology along cultural lines met with resistance not only from academic psychology, which dismissed his work as unscientific, but from Jungian psychology, which tended to regard his “revisioning” as irrelevant. “Why should Jung’s work be revisioned or updated?” some complained. A few Jungian analysts said Hillman’s work was a form of philosophy and not relevant to clinical practice. This attitude, however, does not accord with Jung’s views, which are more in line with those of Hillman.

Championing What Has Been Lost

Despite the clinical field that operates under his name, Jung’s interests were never confined to the clinic but extended far beyond it. He was impressed by the premodern, medieval understanding of soul as a cosmogonic truth: “In reality, our psyche spreads far beyond the confines of the conscious mind, as was apparently known long ago to the old alchemist who said that the soul was for the greater part outside the body” (Jung, 1942/1954, § 389). The soul is a cosmos in itself, as vast and wide as the physical universe. It seems to intersect with the physical universe, to run as it were alongside it, and forms the basis of all that exists. From this insight developed Jung’s theory of synchronicity, the acausal connecting bond between humanity and world (Jung, 1952). Jung postulated the existence of a psychoid reality, a theoretical point at which matter and spirit meet. This, in turn, led to his recovery of the idea of the *unus mundus* or one world, which he found in alchemy and Neoplatonism. He also became interested in Chinese alchemy, about which he wrote: “The psyche is a world in which the ego is contained. Perhaps there are fishes who believe that they contain the sea. It is our responsibility to do away with this pervasive illusion” (Jung, 1929, § 75).

It is for Jung an illusion to think that the psyche is confined to our interior realm. For him, soul is not inside us, but *we are in the*

soul. The conventional spatial categories are reversed and soul changed from that which is contained by the human to that which contains it. Jung became interested in Eastern philosophies precisely because he saw in them an acknowledgement of the cosmic nature of mind. Western philosophy claims there is no evidence for the existence of mind outside the human, but Jung is alarmed at this presupposition:

The development of Western philosophy during the last two centuries has succeeded in isolating the mind in its own sphere and in severing it from its primordial oneness with the universe. Man himself has ceased to be the microcosm and eidolon [image, double] of the cosmos, and his “anima” is no longer the substantial *scintilla*, or spark of the *Anima Mundi*, the World Soul. (Jung, 1939/1954, § 759)

We have cut off mind from the cosmos, and Jung sees this as the seal of our alienation. We have blocked out the universal, failing to see that our souls are “sparks” or *scintilla* of a larger world soul. “It is just possible that our mind is nothing but a perceptible manifestation of a Universal Mind” (Jung, 1939/1954, § 760). The lost “universal mind,” he argues, is to be found in our unconscious. It is the psychology of the unconscious that opens a bridge between Eastern and Western conceptions of mind.

It is ironic that Hillman has been constructed by the Jungian world as an *enfant terrible* or rebel, when he is reminding this tradition of key aspects of Jung’s work. The philosophical dimensions of Jung’s work were forgotten or suppressed as the Jungian tradition became professionalized and focused on the problems of neurotic individuals in therapy. The fact that the world might be in need of therapeutic care and attention was not its concern. In this sense, Sonu Shamdasani is correct in his assessment that “The history of Jungian psychology has in part consisted in a radical and unacknowledged diminution of Jung’s goal” (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 15). The larger aspects of psyche may seem “irrelevant” to busy clinicians dealing with daily schedules, but Jung argued that the world soul is not merely an academic matter:

Only the individual consciousness that has lost its connection with the psychic totality remains caught in the illusion that the soul is a small circumscribed area, a fit subject for scientific theorizing. The loss of this great relationship is the prime evil of neurosis. (Jung, 1934, § 367)

This is an important statement since it links the philosophical areas of Jung’s work with the realities of clinical practice. Healing takes place when the personal consciousness regains its contact with a psychic

totality. There is no division between the personal and the cosmological, and no dividing line between philosophy and clinical work. The loss of the cosmic dimension is a factor in the construction of psychopathology. If it is important in healing, how can it be ignored by clinicians?

Archetypal Psychology as a Therapy of the World

Hillman made the cosmological dimension a central concern of his work. It is found in his major work *Re-Visioning Psychology* and further elaborated in his seminal essay “*Anima Mundi: The Return of the Soul to the World*” (Hillman, 1975; Hillman, 1982/1992). In the 1990s he contextualized this concern as an explicitly “ecological” one in his contribution to Theodore Roszak’s *Ecop-sychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind* (Hillman, 1995) and in his popular book with Michael Ventura, *We’ve Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—and the World’s Getting Worse* (Hillman & Ventura, 1992). Hillman is accused of claiming too much originality for himself in these works, as if boasting that he had recovered single-handedly the heritage of the world soul. But this is a misreading of his intentions. He was always aware that he was reclaiming part of the lost heritage of Jungian thought. But he was in an ideal time and place to emphasize the ecological consequences of the theory of *anima mundi*, whereas Jung, writing in an earlier time, was not able draw out these consequences that are important for our time.

It was true, however, that Hillman gained mischievous delight in pushing these lost elements forward, almost in the spirit of championing what had been repressed. He argued eloquently that the loss of the cosmic dimension and the loss of the human soul are related. He wrote: “the soul of the individual can never advance beyond the soul of the world, because they are inseparable, the one always implicating the other” (Hillman, 1992, p. 105). He added: “Any alteration in the human psyche resonates with a change in the psyche of the world” (Hillman, 1992, p. 105). If we neglect the soul of the world, it is merely a matter of time before this impacts on human interiority. Hillman was not neglecting clinical issues or abandoning the clinical world as charged but was extending the clinical into the environmental. He was, as we shall see, reconnecting with the lost tradition of animism and relating the loss of an “animated” vision of the world to the ecological emergency of our time.

I began my professional association with Hillman in 1982, which was in the middle of his attempt to revision psychology by turning psyche inside out (Tacey, 1998). At that stage I was in my 20s and unsure of Hillman’s project or why he was at odds with the Jungian tradition. I was attracted by his seriousness but did not understand

why he had positioned himself as an opponent of Jungian psychology. It took me some time to comprehend why the split had occurred and what the matters of contention were. Everything hinged on the notion of soul in the world, and his objection to the *privatization* of soul that was promulgated by therapy. Hillman's intention was not only to restore soul to world but to reposition therapy so that it took the world's suffering into account (Hillman, 1983, p. 1). "The curative or salvational vision of archetypal psychology focuses upon the soul in the world which is also the soul of the world (*anima mundi*)" (Hillman, 1983, p. 26). At most, clinical work was an application of a theory that had its sights on a larger goal. His work was moving in the direction of a recovery of animism as a mode of perception, a way of being in the world.

The Changing Fortunes of Animism

Animism is defined by dictionaries as the experience of nature as a field inhabited by spirits. The theory of animism was developed by the anthropologist Edward Tylor in his 1871 work *Primitive Culture*, in which he defined it as "the theory of the universal animation of nature" (Tylor, 1871/1974, p. 3). As a rationalist, Tylor believed such a view was "childish" and typical of what he called "cognitive underdevelopment." However, his theory looks at ancient cultures with a jaundiced eye and is unsympathetic to what might be metaphorical in this worldview. It assumes a kind of occult approach to the animation of nature and refutes it based on "commonsense." Taking the animistic systems at face value, it says "there are no gods or spirits out there, and as such these systems are delusional." In the same way, a rationalist might turn to the gods of Greece and claim that the Homeric pantheon is delusional, because the gods cannot be proved to exist. But how useful would this debunking be, and why should we take it seriously? Why do those with little imagination have so much sway over what determines reality?

We have not only undervalued the significance of ancient cultures but have landed ourselves in a spiritual wasteland by reading the products of former times in a reductively literal manner. We have failed to understand that imagination and myth are windows into, not escapes from, reality. They attempt to tell us the inside story of the forces that animate nature. The fact that ancient cultures might know more about the world than we do never occurs to the originators of these theories. The "animistic" systems are not childish attempts at natural science but myths that try to explain our experience of the emotional and spiritual impact of the world. This is lost on those who are peddling notions of the superiority of our knowledge over earlier views. The theory of animism assumes that the world we inhabit is

unalive and without spiritual dimension, and it has taken its cues from Descartes and other enlightenment thinkers. The modern view assumes that so-called primitive peoples, children, and the insane *project* their psychic contents into the world, giving it an illusory animation.

As an analytic category, animism had its origins in 19th century anthropology and was used to indicate the distance between Europeans and conquered peoples. In particular it was employed to measure the distance between "primitive" beliefs and the "one true faith" of Christianity. In anthropology, the category was abandoned for decades, because it was felt to be prejudicial toward indigenous peoples. But with the advent of postmodernism, it has experienced a revival, and anthropologists speak of an "animistic turn" (Gell, 1998; Ingold, 2000). No longer viewed as pejorative or incorrect, it is used in the opposite sense, as pointing to non-Western epistemologies that deconstruct the Western imperialist project. The animistic turn in anthropology has been indebted to Heidegger's philosophy, which opened up the possibility of multiple kinds of epistemology (Weiner, 2001). Animism has also emerged in archaeology, with a similarly profound possibility of meaning. The challenge to Western knowledge is seen as refreshing, bracing, and an alternative to materialist assumptions. The best scholars in these fields no longer adopt complacent assumptions about reality. Animism pushes toward a postcolonial critique of academic discourses, and some point to the need for "post-Western" perspectives (Haber, 2009).

According to Hillman, animism, perceived as a soulful participation in the world, is a natural part of our experience. It is no coincidence, he says, that *anima*, *animation*, and *animism* share the same linguistic roots. Where there is soul there is *anima*, and where there is *anima* there is animation—and animism. The soul requires myth for its expression, and myth is dependent on the "personifying" mode which creates gods, spirits, and the "little people" that populate mythic systems. If the rational mind does not like it, then so much the worse for those who embrace that view. In his characteristically humorous and adversarial style, Hillman writes:

The theory of animism represents a condition of soul (*anima*) which cannot find soul except as projected into infantile behavior [and the] psychopathology of fetishism....[It says] less about the soul of primitives than about the primitive soul of those writing about them. Animism is an anthropological report about the soul of anthropology. (Hillman, 1975, p. 13)

The Dutch philosopher of religion, Van der Leeuw, would agree: "In its entire structure and tendency, this theory [of animism] suits the

second half of the nineteenth century far better than it does the primitive world" (Van der Leeuw, 1933/1963, Section 9, § 1). What Hillman and Van der Leeuw are saying is that the early views on animism are statements of opinion and should be treated as such, not dignified as science. It is not self-evident that the world does not have a spiritual dimension, that indigenous peoples are "crazy" or projecting fantasies, that they are interacting with the world in ways that ought to provoke laughter and derision. Indeed the way we moderns see the world could well be delusional. Some dismiss ancient visions as unscientific, but our rational approach may be missing more than we realize. Earth may not "have" spirit as an object or possession, but earth could be *inside* a spiritual field. If this were the case, the earth is bathed in a field which is invisible to the eye and only becomes visible to imagination or vision.

Hillman and the New Animism

Hillman believed that postmodernism has exposed science as merely one lens or "fantasy" through which we see the world. There are other lenses, and some are more appropriate than others when it comes to seeing soul in the world. It is not that Hillman is not capable of scientific thought, but he is impatient with the slow pace of science and does not want his intuitive apprehension to be stymied by questions of scientific validity. This is perhaps another way of saying that Hillman is a poet rather than a scientist, and as such he has the ability to draw out the poetic and mythic qualities of psychology. In *Re-Visioning Psychology*, Hillman attempted to win psychology back from science and enlist it in the service of poetry. He asserts a "poetic basis of mind" and argues that psychology should "start neither in the physiology of the brain, the structure of language, the organization of society, nor the analysis of behavior, but in the processes of imagination" (Hillman, 1975, p. xi).

Mind for Hillman is mythopoetic, and there is no need to reduce it to scientific terms. Just as poetry is based on metaphors, Hillman insists that a psychology based on archetypes is necessarily metaphorical. "Archetypes are metaphors rather than things. We find ourselves less able to say what an archetype is literally and more inclined to describe them in images. Archetypes throw us into an imaginative style of discourse" (Hillman, 1975, p. xiii.). Although Jungian psychologists still try, following Jung, to rescue the scientific status of their work, Hillman and his followers jettison science and content themselves with metaphor and myth as explanatory principles.

One difference between Hillman and classical Jungians is found in their approach to projections. It is standard practice in Jungian

analysis to invite patients to "withdraw" projections and see things "out there"—especially things that are affect-laden or disturbing—as interior objects of the psyche. Hillman accepts this up to a point, when it comes to psychological contents of a personal nature. But when it comes to archetypal contents, or those related to the world of cosmology and myth, he argues that to "withdraw" these "projections" leaves the world denuded and empty. Psychology that is unchecked by a love of the world eventually psychologizes everything, until there is nothing left. Freud had already said that the ancient view of an animated universe "is nothing but psychology projected into the external world" (Freud, 1901/1953, pp. 258–259). Hillman is opposed to the standard psychoanalytic view of projection: "The idea of projection," he says, is "one of depth psychology's denial of things as they are so as to maintain its view of the world" (Hillman, 1992, p. 99). In a fit of rage, he refers to the theory of projection as a "defense" against *anima mundi*, and as such, it "needs reversing." "What psychology has had to call 'projection' is simply animation...[in which] the soul of the thing corresponds or coalesces with ours" (Hillman, 1992, p. 102.).

In his foreword to *Ecopsychology*, Hillman says he reflects less on the difficulty of extending psychology across the Cartesian divide than on how and why psychology was uprooted from its base in philosophy and poetry:

Sometimes I wonder less how to shift the paradigm [from inside to outside] than how psychology ever got so off base. How did it cut itself off from reality? Where else in the world would a human soul be so divorced from the spirits of the surroundings? Even the high intellectualism of the Renaissance, to say nothing of the modes of mind in ancient Egypt and Greece or contemporary Japan, allowed for the animation of things, recognizing a subjectivity in animals, plants, wells, springs, trees, and rocks. Psychology, so dedicated to awakening human consciousness, needs to wake itself up to one of the most ancient human truths: we cannot be studied or cured apart from the planet. (Hillman, 1995, p. xxii)

According to Hillman, animism is a natural part of our experience of the world. He makes an important link between the rebirth of animism and the "symptoms" that are appearing in the present ecological emergency:

The renaissance of a psychology that returns psychic reality to the world will find its starting point in psychopathology, in the actualities of the psyche's own suffering where depth psychology always arises. (Hillman, 1992, p. 91)

The world, because of its breakdown, is entering a new moment of consciousness: by drawing attention to itself by means of its symptoms, it is becoming aware of itself as a psychic reality. The world is now the subject of immense suffering, exhibiting acute and crass symptoms by means of which it defends itself against collapse. (Hillman, 1992, p. 97)

In conversation with Michael Ventura, Hillman exclaims:

The world has become full of symptoms. Isn't that the beginning of recognizing what used to be called animism? The world's alive [and] it's having effects on us....There's pathology in the world and through that we're beginning to treat the world with more respect. The soul is always being rediscovered through pathology. In the nineteenth century people didn't talk about psyche, until Freud came along and discovered psychopathology. (Hillman & Ventura, 1992, p. 4)

Just as psyche speaks through pathology and disease, and was discovered through symptoms, we are faced with the rediscovery of soul-in-the-world through ecological illnesses. This is a genuinely original insight of Hillman's and an important one for the recovery of ecological integrity. To become sane, we need to become a little crazy and see that the world's sufferings are cracks, fissures, doorways into what might be called the inside of the world. It is through the cracks that the soul of the world is being revealed, but if the world "cracks up" there will be no future. Therefore, working on the symptoms of the ecological breakdown is not only important for physical survival but is a way of facing the repressed subjectivity of the world. The world is coming alive to us because we can feel its suffering as never before.

According to Hillman, a psychology that sees the world as a play of archetypes must lead to a restoration of animism: "The artificial tension between soul and world, private and public, interior and exterior disappears when the soul as *anima mundi*, and its making, is located in the world" (Hillman, 1983, p. 26). Perhaps we could call it postmodern animism, or a new version of pan-psychism. Hillman's view is both "old-fashioned and radically novel" (Hillman, 1975, p. ix). It is not a regression to a previous stage of history but an awakening, in the modern context, of an ancient and archaic mode of apprehension. As Mircea Eliade put it: "The sacred is an element in the structure of consciousness, not a stage in the history of consciousness" (Eliade, 1969/1975, p. i). As a structure of thought, animism is destined to return. It will return, Hillman says, in conjunction with our experience of a disordered world. As Jung announced in 1929, "the gods have become diseases" (Jung, 1929, § 54), so today

we might say "the spirits of the earth are toxic," and we are urged to take them seriously.

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